

To: The State Board of Education

From: Vince Boland, Retired Skilled Trades Teacher, Chairperson of Vocational, Career and Technical Education Committee of NJEA (New Jersey Education Association), and Executive Committee Member of CTEANJ (Career and Technical Education Association of New Jersey)

Subject: New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee Recommendations

Good day. I am Vince Boland, a recently retired skilled trade teacher. For the last twenty years, I taught high school students in a vocational school. I serve as chairperson of the Vocational Career and Technical Education Committee of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) and as an Executive Committee member of the Career and Technical Education Association of New Jersey (CTEANJ).

Vocational and Technical Education Programs, now referred to as Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs, are centered on 10 career clusters: Agribusiness, Communications, Entrepreneurship, Financial Services, Life Sciences, Gaming and Tourism, and Transportation. Within these disciplines, students are expected to master the basic priorities of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Despite this jam-packed, comprehensive curriculum, vocational schools are now being called upon to implement educational reform efforts including high school redesign, 21st Century Skills, and the American Diploma Project.

Vocational Education is in a change cycle. Today's vo-tech schools go far beyond the traditional settings and now serve as vocational academies that often lead students to advanced study in their respective fields. They also lead to STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics - initiatives, many of which are high-tech trade programs with apprenticeship options. Our students are on the path to careers, not just jobs.

We are deeply concerned with recommendations of the High School Redesign Committee that would require our students to take additional science, math, language arts, and performing arts classes. There are not enough hours in the school day to incorporate these classes into our already intense vocational and technical educational programs. CTE programs – and ultimately our students – would be negatively impacted. There could be an end to shared-time programs and some full-time programs could also be eliminated. This is a shortsighted approach.

CTE programs require students to complete minimum hours of study in their chosen fields. For example, a cosmetology student must complete 1000 hours of study to qualify for the entry level licensing test. Students in the construction trades and auto/transportation field must complete a minimum number of class hours to qualify for federally recognized, state-approved apprentice programs. These programs are necessary to prepare our students to be successful workers in our increasingly technological world.

Our intention is to point out the impracticality of the High School Redesign Committee's recommendation for increased classroom study. Not all students would benefit from an intense college prep curriculum. Some students thrive when given a practical, hands-on approach to learning. Technical courses are best learned in a lab setting. That's why all the sciences are taught with labs connected to the classroom coursework. The State Board should consider allowing some of our existing CTE courses to fulfill math and science requirements since many of these programs are very technical in nature.

New Jersey has a diverse student population with a wide range of learning styles and strengths. No single set of high school courses will prepare ALL students to succeed in college and the workplace. The essential skills and core knowledge all students need can be developed and measured through various content areas, including career and technical education.